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SAMUEL McCREA CAVERT

The World Church IN EUROPE

TRIENNIAL MEETING • 1943

SAMUEL MCCREA CAVERT, *General Secretary of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America since 1921, is a graduate of Union College with a master's degree from Columbia University. He received his Bachelor of Divinity degree from Union Theological Seminary and holds honorary degrees from Lawrence, Union, and Ohio Wesleyan. In 1917, he became associated with the General War Time Commission of the Churches, and in 1919 Secretary of the Committee on the War and the Religious Outlook. Through the years Dr. Cavert has been closely associated with the ecumenical movement, attending the Jerusalem meeting of the International Missionary Council in 1928 and the conferences in Oxford and Edinburgh in 1937. He is a member of the Provisional Committee of the World Council of Churches. Dr. Cavert was appointed by President Roosevelt to the Advisory Committee on Political Refugees. In 1942 he went to Europe for the purpose of strengthening the contacts between the Churches of America and those of Europe, the first representative to go on such a mission after the entrance of the United States into the World War. The paper printed here was read before the Triennial Meeting of the Woman's Auxiliary to the National Council in Cleveland, Ohio, October, 1943.*

The Church in Europe

SAMUEL MCCREA CAVERT

ONE of the most gratifying aspects of the life of the Church in relation to the present war is the extent to which contacts between Christians of different lands have been maintained. Although the obstacles imposed by wartime censorships make it almost impossible for citizens of Germany or of the Axis-occupied nations to express their views openly, a surprising amount of information is quietly transmitted from friend to trusted friend. Most of these comments at last make their way to the Geneva headquarters of the World Council of Churches, which, even in its embryonic form, is an informal center of a great network of communication between Christian leaders of nearly all countries. It has been my good fortune to keep regularly in touch with its office and also to spend six weeks in the neutral countries of Europe, chiefly Switzerland, at the end of last year. On the

basis of these contacts I undertake to make at least a fragmentary report as to what is happening in the Churches of the Continent.

THE CHURCH UNDER THE AXIS

TO appreciate the situation in which our fellow-Christians live in most of the European continent today we must bear in mind that their central problem is where the next meal is coming from. Portugal is the only country in which the people are getting enough to eat, except for a partial exception of Switzerland and Sweden. Although 2,500 calories per day are generally regarded as an essential minimum for health, the French, at least in the cities, are probably getting considerably less than half that amount. The people strike even a casual observer as dispirited and apathetic, a condition which is doubtless due in large part to undernourishment. And there are several countries which are much worse off than France, certainly Greece and Poland and probably Belgium, with Jugoslavia, Norway, Spain, and Finland almost as bad. With increasing undernourishment goes increasing susceptibility to disease and epidemic.

As for the Churches, they are greatly weakened by their long struggle with a hostile political power. To find an adequate parallel for what the Churches have suffered from the Nazi regime, one has to go back to the persecution of the early Christians in the Roman Empire. The attitude of Hitler and Himmler toward the Church is not very different from that of Nero and Caligula. In both cases the Church could be allowed to function freely only if it were willing to serve the ends of a State dominated by anti-Christian standards.

As a result there is a long and painful record of disabilities

under which the Churches have suffered. There have been cases, as in Poland, where their properties and funds have been confiscated. In Germany they have not been allowed to continue their Confessional schools, which were the chief resource for the Christian education of children. In Germany the Y.M.C.A. is not allowed to carry on any recreational or social work lest it prove too strong a rival of the Hitler *Jugend*. In France and several other countries the Salvation Army has been forced to disband. The Churches of Germany have been deprived of a large part of their leadership through the conscription of the clergy for the fighting front and through the closing of many theological schools. In all countries under the Axis the printing of Christian literature, including the Bible, has nearly ceased. The alleged reason is shortage of paper which, however, does not prevent a stream of copies of *Mein Kampf* from pouring from the presses.

Yet in spite of all that the Churches have suffered, or perhaps because of it, they have displayed an amazing spiritual vitality. There are countless illustrations of the fact that the spirit of the martyrs still lives.

In Norway the Church has become the great symbol of the struggle of the people for freedom. When Quisling tried to coerce the Church into doing his will, all seven of the bishops resigned in a body. Bishop Bergraav, the head of the Church, has been interned for a year and a half. Out of the whole body of the clergy, more than a thousand, only a few score succumbed to the Quislingist pressure. All the rest refused and accepted a temporary disestablishment of the Church, including the loss of their salaries from the State, as the price of their spiritual freedom. One historic scene is a vivid reflection of their spirit. When the Cathedral at Trondheim was closed and its dean arrested, by order of a Quisling

puppet, a great throng of people assembled outside the Cathedral in the snow, on a bitterly cold day, and conducted their service there, concluding with Martin Luther's hymn, A Mighty Fortress is our God. They must have found new meaning in the lines:

Let goods and kindred go,
This mortal life also;
The body they may kill:
God's truth abideth still.

In Holland scores of the best intellectual and spiritual leaders of the Church have been imprisoned or held as hostages—among them Professor Hendrik Kraemer of the University of Leyden, the foremost foreign missionary leader on the Continent. But the effect of such a dragooning of the Church has only been to intensify the loyalty of the people to it. When, through a friend, Dr. Kraemer was able to send word to some of his fellow-Christians outside of Holland to read Philippians 1:12, 14 (which, you recall, was a message from a prison in the First Century) this is what they learned: *Now I would have you know that the things which have happened unto me have fallen out unto the progress of the Gospel; for most of the brethren in the Lord, being confident through my bonds, are more abundantly bold to speak the word of God without fear.*

In France, the Church, although perplexed and baffled by the political confusion, has raised the sole voice in that unhappy land in defense of the Jews. When the deportation of the Jews began, Pastor Marc Boegner, president of the Reformed Church, went personally to Marshal Petain to protest. The Roman Catholic and the Protestant bodies adopted a common strategy, each sending out a pastoral letter, often read in defiance of the police, declaring that the Christian con-

science could not support what was taking place. A group of pastors organized something like an underground railroad to help Jews, threatened with a deportation which meant slavery or death, to escape to the Swiss border where asylum could be found. Several French pastors were arrested for participating in this program.

From Germany there comes sufficient evidence to make it clear that the Church is still the chief center of disaffection with the Nazi regime. Pastor Niemoeller has been in prison or concentration camp continuously for six years. And he has his successors who speak out as boldly as he did at an earlier stage: a Protestant successor in Bishop Wurm of Stuttgart, a Roman Catholic successor in Bishop von Galen of Münster. The fact that they have not suffered the same fate as Niemoeller is almost certainly due to the fact that they have so strong a following that the Gestapo does not dare to risk another *cause célèbre.* Of course, the number of outspoken critics is not large in wartime, but there is abundant reason to believe that a large section of the German clergy, both Roman Catholic and Protestant, have not been nazified in their hearts and have refrained from providing any moral and spiritual undergirding of Nazism. If the German morale is weak, this is certainly due in part to the failure of Hitler effectively to nazify the Christian Church.

As one begins to learn what is happening to the Church under the Axis, there is nothing which summarizes his feeling better than the remark which Theodore Beza, the Reformation scholar, once addressed to the angry King of Navarre: *Sire, it is the lot of the Church, in whose name I speak, to receive blows, not to inflict them; but may it please your Majesty to remember that the Church is an anvil which has worn out many hammers.*

THE CHURCH'S PART IN RECONSTRUCTION

EVEN a slight contact with the Continent of Europe is sufficient to indicate that the task of post-war relief and reconstruction will be staggering. It will be a task so stupendous that all the Churches and voluntary agencies in the world would not be able to do all that needs to be done. The major part of physical and medical help will have to be provided by governments, for only governments will be able to command adequate resources. But the people of Europe will need more than food for the body; they will need sustenance for the soul also. They will need faith and hope and love. To provide such resources for the spirit of man as well as to share in caring for the body, will be supremely the task of the Christian Church. It should be the responsibility of our American Churches to help put the Christian institutions of the Continent on their feet again so that they will be able to do what only they can do for their own people.

Owing to the totalitarian character of this war the Churches have been far more deeply affected by it than in the first World War. Several Churches have passed through such radical conflicts that their structure is gravely disrupted. Yet these very Churches, as a result of their years of struggle, have developed a stronger sense of their responsibility to the nation as a whole and will be spiritually ready for fresh efforts both in evangelism and in Christian social work. The first task will be to help in rebuilding the whole Church organization in order that it may be able to serve its own people.

This program of reconstruction, so far as one can now see, must include:

1. Restoration of ruined churches and other buildings of Christian service;

2. Replenishing resources of Churches and Christian movements whose funds have been confiscated;

3. Enabling Christian institutions of mercy, such as those which care for the sick, the poor, orphans, the aged, and refugees, to enlarge their work in view of the increased need for physical relief;

4. Reconstructing Christian youth organizations which have been disorganized, sometimes under coercion;

5. Providing for the training of a new supply of pastors and lay-workers, now sorely depleted, including aid to theological schools and scholarships;

6. Assisting in the production of Christian literature, now almost at a standstill in several countries.

So vast a program cannot be carried out merely on a denominational basis. It must be approached in a truly ecumenical spirit and be an expression of a Christian solidarity in which each group recognizes each other group as members of the one Body of Christ. All the Churches which can help must help all the Churches which need help; and that without any thought of proselytism. There will naturally be especially close relations between Churches of the same confessional family, but every section of the reconstruction program must be coördinated with all other sections. The keynote of the whole effort must be one not of denominational extension but of working with and through the Churches in each country in accordance with a general plan which is understood and accepted by all.

Since many Churches of many nations will be involved in the work of reconstruction, both on the giving and the receiving end, the problem of coördination becomes acute. There is serious danger of competition, of overlapping, and

of conflict of policy. Fortunately the World Council of Churches affords the needed center for such coördination. Within its fellowship it will surely be possible to arrive at a voluntary correlation of efforts which will leave every Church free to act within the framework of a generally accepted policy which all have helped to formulate.

At a meeting of the Continental members of the Provisional Committee of the World Council, held in Geneva, September 25 and 26, 1942, it was therefore proposed that a Department of Reconstruction of Christian Institutions in Europe should be created within the World Council. Its functions would be:

1. To survey the needs of all Churches and organizations which are members of or collaborate with the ecumenical movement

2. To bring these needs to the attention of the Churches which are able to help

3. To register all projects of aid from one Church to another and to coördinate these projects

4. To formulate and develop relief projects in cases in which the help of several Churches is needed

5. To act as an executive agency of relief in cases in which it is asked to do so by one or more giving Churches.

A BETTER WORLD AFTER THE WAR

AS for the political character of the post-war world, there is an urgent need for a fuller understanding between American Christians and European Christians. One is forced to admit that at the present time there is a gulf between them. We tend to approach the post-war period in terms of an ideal world order of the future, while they are preoccupied with the terrify-

ing realities which they will face on the first day after the bombs cease to fall. We in America are talking much about a new world organization which will make a radical break with the existing nationalistic structure. To our fellow-Christians in Europe this seems romantic and utopian.

All this was made concrete for me in an unforgettable conversation at the home of a friend in Geneva where a group of Christians of diverse national backgrounds talked frankly of their hopes and fears for the post-war world. I had urged the reasonableness of extending the federal principle, to which we Americans are accustomed in our political structure, to Europe and to the entire world. When I had finished there was a significant silence. No one took formal exception to the proposal; they simply went off on another tack. They were too absorbed in immediate problems to be able to concentrate on a long-range ideal. Here is the kind of thing which they said:

The Swiss was worried about the prospect of a virtual invasion of his country by starved hordes of people from surrounding countries, seeking the one place where food might be found.

The Dutchman felt that the Nazi tyranny was engendering so much resentment that his people would rise up and massacre the Nazis as soon as the occupation was lifted.

The Swede feared that Communism would sweep over his country and much of Europe.

The Frenchman could foresee nothing better than civil war in his land.

The German predicted that after the collapse of the Nazi regime there would be no center of authority whatever in Germany and that a reign of sheer anarchy would ensue.

Our European friends want to know whether we are preparing to deal with such actualities as these or whether we

are theorizing about world community in a vacuum. They fear that when we come up against these stark conditions we will be impatient and revert to isolationism again instead of staying persistently on the job and helping to win the peace.

American and European Christians need to supplement each other's experiences and insights. They are right in insisting that any workable post-war plan must first of all be directed toward the concrete emergency problems which will clamor for instant solution and which cannot be postponed until some comprehensive international structure has been completed. We, on the other hand, are right in not letting them forget the need for a long-range perspective on the world situation. Unless there is a clear discernment of the kind of international order toward which mankind must move, the decisions about emergent problems will be lacking in the faith and vision without which no better world is possible.

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